

Technology engendering innovation within the aged care and disability sectors

By Hiam Sakakini, Co-Founder, ThinkChangeGrow

- The intersection of technology and innovation reveals an increasing emphasis on a human-centric approach in the aged care and disability sectors.
- Technological innovations can bring people together in more socially and economically inclusive ways.
- This article provides four tips on emerging technology trends for the aged care and disability sectors.

The changes in the aged care and disability sectors are driven largely by recent funding reforms, consumer need for choice and control, and advances in technology. This article focuses on emerging trends in the aged and disability sectors and the potential benefits in terms of business, people and culture practices.

We have an ageing population: more people are living longer and want to live independently for as long as possible. It is estimated that 22.6 per cent of the population in 2055 will be 65 and over (8.9 million people) in comparison with 15 per cent in 2015 (3.6 million people). We also know that one in five people in Australia are living with a disability. So with huge change reflected in the funding shifts to the consumers' pockets through NDIS and CDC rather than block funding given to the agencies who deliver services, there is massive opportunity in these two sectors.

This calls for organisations in these sectors to become much more sustainable. They will need to attract and retain customers who can theoretically take their business anywhere. This new reality holds implications on all aspects of these organisations from how they run their business to new roles to how their culture will evolve. Unless the non-government sector has the capacity and confidence to grow substantially, the gap between demand and supply will increase.

Although our four tips will focus on emerging trends in technology, we must caveat that we are seeing this in organisations that have flexible teams, strong leadership, are open to taking measured risks and who are co-designing what the future of aged and disability care can look like with their customers. The recommendations which follow, are guided by the need to be pragmatic, flexible and less bureaucratic; to re-invigorate the principle of co-design and to improve communication and innovation.

1. Investing in technology starts with people

Changes in funding are creating opportunities for like-minded organisations with complementary skills and client sets to come together. One such example, Omnicare Alliance, used this as an opportunity to re-invest in technology for their staff.

'As we are going through a merger, technology has played a vital role in knitting the three separate workforces together. We needed to invest now as we have been given block funding. We know the technology needs to sustain us for at least four to five years so we look at the capability of the technology not just for now but for the long-term. It needs to be flexible, adaptable and sustainable.'

'We also had to consider the needs of the workforce of the future. In aged care as people want to stay in their homes longer. That means our workforce needs to become more mobile. We have changed everything to be mobile-enabled. Our rosters,

client profiles, invoicing and receipts. Staff are no longer office bound. Now using Surface Pros. For example, our home modifications team can now invoice their customers on the go after completing the job', says Raymond Gouck Co-CEO.

This trend is not unique to Omnicare Alliance as a report from NDS and Curtin University on Australia's Disability Services Sector 2016 show that 30 per cent of organisations are increasing their information, communications and technology budget.

Ultimately, the risk lies in investing in the wrong technology. According to Bruce Nixon, CEO of Holocentric, 'If you implemented a system and were no more effective than you were before or at worse, productivity declined, this could kill your business by causing customers to churn. In the new world of aged care and disability, customer retention is crucial.

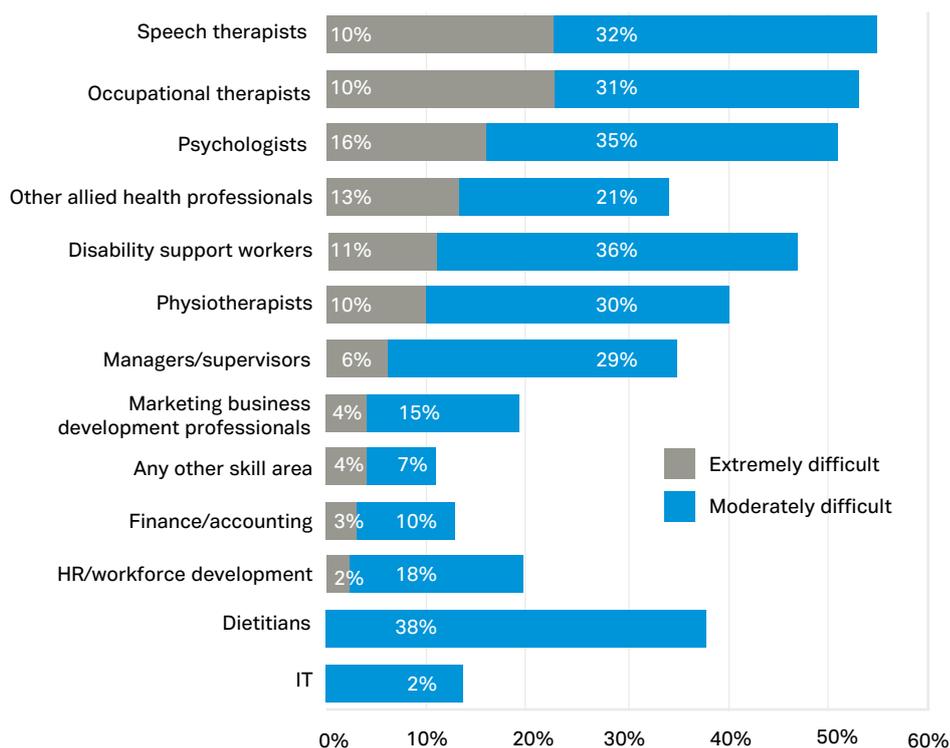
'When it comes to implementing any tech changes to process, systems and governance/compliance procedures, some challenges that organisations are facing is that current processes are not well documented. There is no common understanding on how things work. There are siloes or pockets of different technology being used for the same purpose. This typically happens in industries such as aged care and disability that have not had to change in a while.'

Holocentric uses a unique method for combating this by taking a digital representation of how businesses currently work, for example, what are the roles, behaviour, risk structure; and then simulates what the future state could look like before making a change. We highly recommend taking this 'try before you buy' approach to understand the implications on the various roles and people from a tech roll out.

2. Lead with a collaborative, human-centric approach

With change comes opportunities for organisations to reinvent themselves according to the needs of their customers and operate at their most optimal. We are enjoying watching new players that lead with technology join this sector and be welcomed with open arms by more traditional organisations.

Figure 1: Ease or difficulty in recruiting staff in the 2015-16 financial year



Report: 2016 State of the Disability Sector Report released

The state of the workforce: Ease or difficulty in recruiting staff in the 2015-16 financial Year

Collaboration breeds innovation. For example, Omnicare Alliance who specialise in building capacity for dementia sufferers, leveraged support from Home Care Heroes, a new kind of player in the aged care and disability sector matches caregivers with those that need assistance via a portal.

'We use Homecare Heroes to augment our workforce. They provide services such as, companionship, light housework and outings, which allows our highly skilled staff to do more on the capability building front. So rather than seeing new entries to the market as threats, we look at ways to collaborate which ultimately benefits the client who needs a full spectrum of support.' says Raymond Gouck.

This solves a real problem of a shortage of skilled workers in the industry. See Figure 1.

The mantra in Google was to 'focus on the user and all else will follow.' The Google search algorithm is constantly responding to feedback which it receives from users on the usefulness of the information it provides. It uses that information to dynamically move

search results up or down the rankings based on how useful people on the other side of the screen are finding those results.

In today's transparent world where all providers will be ranked and reviewed in some way shape or form, it is imperative that feedback is listened to and acted on as quickly and dynamically as search results listings in Google. It can be as simple as a tablet at the reception area as someone signs out of a facility asking, 'How was your experience today?' giving three simple options that requires minimal response time.

With millennials due to make up more than 50 per cent of the general workforce by 2025, it is also just as important to consider the employee experience as it is the customer experience. Jenna Leo, CEO of Home Care Heroes says, 'Technology builds connections that bring people together who might not normally come together. People are looking for that "why" or that connection in what they are doing. It's allowed us to tap into people who might not normally consider aged or disability care as something they want to work

on. We are making it more appealing to get started in this space. It's becoming just as normal to be a hero and help out people as it is to work in a cafe. Much more appealing than going into a 'support worker role'.

As the heroes work as independent contractors, they are motivated to listen to feedback from the people they care for in order to get good reviews and continue to secure work. Feedback at the individual level is just as powerful as the organisational level and technology can empower both.

For example, if you've experienced the difference between an Uber and a taxi you know how easy it is to find an Uber, how enjoyable it is to ride in a clean car with a complimentary bottle of water and a phone charger at hand, and how nice it is to just leave without fumbling with your credit card and waiting impatiently for the receipt. We must consider the effect that real-time feedback, transparency and ratings can have on the overall experience of the customer and the job satisfaction of the worker.

3. Look at technology through two different lenses

We see the most forward-thinking aged care and disability organisations look at technology through two very different, and very distinct lenses. The first is transforming their own organisation to better communicate, manage and effectively deliver services to their customers. This may include the implementation of a CRM tool, new mobile technology for employees, or use of digital simulation tools like Holocentric. Cyber security will be a more important focus for the CTO to think about with client records holding the key to payment — if those records are compromised so is payment of services.

The second lens we are also seeing are new innovation divisions to organisations — like Remarkable, the inclusive tech accelerator division of Cerebral Palsy Alliance, which allows startups to experiment with future focused technology such as 3D printing, robotics, wearables and apps.

As a mentor to these start-ups, I am impressed by the possibilities that their technology holds for improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

For the longest time, innovators have not wanted to venture into this space because it was so full of regulation and it wasn't considered 'cool'. Technology has allowed it become kind of 'cool'. You can find ways of making it more interesting and appealing to younger people.

When people see robots and sensors that can help people stay in their homes longer. Motion sensors that can sense when someone is not mobile in their house anymore makes this space much more appealing. Much better than slip mats in the shower.' says Jenna Leo who was part of Cerebral Palsy Alliance's Remarkable accelerator program.

Similarly, the more traditional organisations like Omnicare Alliance see a future where robotics and artificial intelligence can play a vital role. Take dementia sufferers for example. If they had a Google home device that could remind them of the steps to making a cup of tea (if that's what they wanted to do) then that device would play a massive role in retaining that person's independence and also safety.

These are two separate technology zones. The first innovates for the now in terms of supporting the current change to a customer centric service model. The other keeps an eye on the future and positions the organisation well for integrating new products and services into the overall suite of products available to the customer. Both vastly different but equally important.

4. Use technology to communicate, communicate, communicate

It will become more crucial for organisation to find new ways to communicate with their employees with workforces becoming more mobile, flexible and independent. We are in times of rapid change where people need to instantly know what is necessary to do their jobs effectively.

Businesses use intranet, apps, emails and video calls to communicate with employees across departments and locations. Without these in play, innovation can come to a grinding halt. Siloed thinking followed by duplication of efforts will become the norm.

An intranet strategy, which is essentially a private hub that can be accessed by authorised personnel within a business

organisation, will become an absolute must for all organisations to become more, nimble, collaborative and responsive.

Social media is also a powerful tool to use with customers in order to build a community. The Cerebral Palsy Alliance has over 58k followers on their Facebook page. This is the kind of asset that any investor would find valuable in a business because it shows the reach and depth of loyalty towards their organisation.

Video has become an absolutely essential tool to tell the story of the organisation, the employee and the customer. People simply consume information via video more than any other medium. Over 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute! Almost 5 billion videos are consumed on YouTube every single day.

We also know more baby boomers are using more aged care services and they are generally more tech savvy — 82 per cent of baby boomers or 'silver surfers' belong to at least one social media site and spend approximately 27 hours per week online, which is about two hours per week more than 16–34 year olds (source Colorado University).

It is important to develop a comprehensive internal and external communications strategy (and role) to harness the full breadth and depth of all the various communication mediums.

In the words of Christine Stow, strategic adviser and advocate for children with disabilities and carers, 'NDIS is the greatest social change since Medicare. As a mother and carer of a child with very complex care needs. Just the thought that we might get support changed the way I was thinking. It is a huge change, a monumental change and one we, as participants, should embrace. Sure there are going to be issues. Even one billion dollars will not make my daughter walk and talk....This is a great change for us all. It is rolling out now and it's our turn to make it what we need it to be — this is our time to shine'.

Times are changing and there are growing pains, but the opportunities are limitless. ■

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